New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1950

Volume XI, Number 24 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 6, 1950

1950 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1949 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
Caesar and Cleopatra	193
Clutterbuck	205
*Death of a Salesman	358
Detective Story	330
Diamond Lil	369
Father (The)	223
*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	198
I Know My Love	233
Lost in the Stars	241
Miss Liberty	279
Rat Race (The)	190
*South Pacific	312
Texas, Li'l Darlin'	214
That Lady	217
Touch and Go	250
Velvet Glove (The)	185

1948 Vol.

As the Girls Go	159
*Kiss Me, Kate	91
Lend an Ear	122
Madwoman of Chaillot (The)	104
*Mister Roberts	338
Where's Charley?	197

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 6, 1950*

1950 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1950

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
*Affairs of State	267
Alive and Kicking	390
All You Need Is One Good Break	352
Arms and the Girl	356
*Arms and the Man	235
As You Like It	367
Barrier (The)	218
Bird Cage (The)	341
*Black Chiffon	261
Burning Bright	238
*Call Me Madam	243
*Cocktail Party (The)	376
Come Back, Little Sheba	348
Consul (The)	329
Cry of the Peacock	316
*Curious Savage (The)	230
Dance Me a Song	380
Daphne Laureola	272
Day After Tomorrow (The)	227
Design for a Stained Glass Window	373
Devil's Disciple (The)	344
Enchanted (The)	387
Freight	303
*Gioconda Smile (The)	250
Great To Be Alive!	324
Happy As Larry	394
*Happy Time (The)	370
*Hilda Crane	221
Innocents (The)	359
Julius Caesar	288
Katherine Dunham and Her Company	309
Legend of Sarah	247
Liar (The)	296
Live Wire (The)	277
Man (The)	384
Medium (The)	280
*Member of the Wedding (The)	397
Mr. Barry's Etchings	362
Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep	336
*Pardon Our French	254
*Peep Show	285
*Peter Pan	306
Phoenix Too Frequent (A)	303
*Season in the Sun	258
Show-Off (The)	292
Southern Exposure	264
Telephone (The)	280
*Tickets, Please!	300
Tobacco Road	333
Wisteria Trees (The)	320
With a Silk Thread	314
CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD	312

Theatre Openings
"Hilda Crane"
"The Barrier"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 6, 1950*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Barrier"

Daily Mirror

November 3, 1950

'The Barrier' Offers Much Trimming, Thin Story

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Michael Myerberg and Joel Spector finally found a home for "The Barrier" at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening. After an out-of-town tune up, this musical version of Langston Hughes' play, "Mulatto," had to take to the subway circuit for a while until a house was available.

Programmed as "a musical drama," "The Barrier" is really of operatic stature. It has book and lyrics by Hughes, music by Jan Meyerowitz. It tells a familiar story with varying effect, a story which has found many forms in its mutations. The story of a boy born of mixed parentage, white and Negro, in the South.

In this instance, he is Bert, son of Col. Thomas Norwood, plantation owner, by Cora Lewis, his housekeeper. The Colonel has had some of his children, results of this miscegenation, educated. But, nevertheless, he insists they use the back door and "keep their place."

When Bert defiantly uses the front door, Col. Tom assaults him and is choked to death by the furious son. Bert then takes his own life to thwart the vengeance of his father's white friends.

"The Barrier," we think, is much too short a work to provide a full and rewarding evening in the theatre. It really should end with the fatal fight and its implications, but in an apparent effort to pad the script, Hughes has resorted to a lyrical flashback which combines dance and song. It was, for us, anticlimactic and broke the tragic mood.

Meyerowitz's score forsakes arias to follow closely and enhance the dramatic values of the libretto. Doris Humphrey has staged the opera to emphasize acting and singing.

Muriel Rahn, as the housekeeper, gives a moving and memorable performance. Her voice has the ability to convey emotion stirringly. Lawrence Tibbett etches Col. Norwood with authority and genuine impact. He sings better than he has in the past several seasons. Wilton Clary is excellent as the headstrong, proud Bert.

Salutes also are due Charlotte Holloman, Lorenzo Herrera, Laurence Watson, Fred Higgins and Victor Thorley.

H. A. Condell has designed an atmospherically drab drawing-room of a run-down mansion.

Myerberg and Spector have given "The Barrier" an admirable production. Despite this, however, the new arrival impresses us as being too sketchy and confused in mood. A limited appeal seems indicated.

"THE BARRIER"

Musical drama based on the play "Mulatto" by Langston Hughes; book and lyrics by Mr. Hughes; music by Jan Meyerowitz; staged by Doris Humphrey; scenery by H. A. Condell; dances by Charles Weidman and Miss Humphrey; presented by Michael Myerberg and Joel Spector at the Broadhurst Theatre, November 2, 1950. The cast:

William.....Lorenzo Herrera
Sally.....Charlotte Holloman
Livonia.....Dolores Bowman
Maid.....Reri Grist
Houseman.....John Diggs
Sam.....Laurence Watson
Talbot.....Victor Thorley
Col. Thomas Norwood.....
Lawrence Tibbett
Cora Lewis.....Muriel Rahn
Fred Higgins...Richard Dennis
Bert.....Wilton Clary
Plantation Storekeeper....
Robert Tankersley
Undertaker.....Jesse Jacobs
Assistant to the Undertaker..
Stuart Hodes
Characters in the Dance Sequence:
Young Norwood.....
Sung by Lawrence Tibbett
Danced by Marc Breaux
Young Cora.....
Sung by Charlotte Holloman
Danced by Josephine Keene
The Bride.....Helene Ellis

Synopsis: The action takes place in a rural Georgia community between noon and night of a hot summer day. Act I. The livingroom at Albamar, Thomas Norwood's plantation. Noon. Act II. Scene 1. The same. Late afternoon. Scene 2. The same. That night.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 3, 1950

'Barrier' Tells Tale Of Master and Maid

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Operatic melodrama.
Topic—Mulattoes.
Treatment—Superficial.
Music—Uneven.
I Find It—Of fitful interest.

"The Barrier" is a thin musical treatment of a thin story. More of a situation than a plot, the narrative tells of a white plantation owner's children by his Negro housekeeper.

The subject ought to have bearing on social attitudes in general, but it is treated here in hackneyed fashion with no particular comment by author or composer.

The musical work takes place in the course of one day. One of the planter's half-white children revolts against his degrading discipline. The boy kills his father in a fight, runs away, but is chased back home by a mob of lynchers, and shoots himself before they catch him.

Rousing Moments.

There are a few moments of rousing interest in the musical. The best of them, a scene in which the housekeeper curses the corpse of her master, got an ovation last night. This central figure of the Negro mother is splendidly sung by Muriel Rahn. If the work as a whole had either the dignity or the humility with which Miss Rahn plays, it would be striking.

The first act seems endless with its exposition, setting the family relationships but offering no reason to support that this day is any different from any other on the plantation. Toward the end of the act there is an initial struggle between the father and son. It by no means compensates for the long, static introduction.

The second act removes the father in its first scene. It then proceeds awkwardly through a dream sequence, to tell the story of the planter and the housekeeper in their youth. The interlude is done in song and ballet, effective in itself but out of key with the rest of the work.

The score seems deliberately designed to avoid melodies. It has the wandering form of improvisation, and only rarely settles down into a neatly constructed passage. Even when this happens, the musical content does not meet the weight of emotions that are involved.

Tibbett as Planter.

Lawrence Tibbett is starred as the planter. Though he seems to approach the opera with no great conviction of its worth, Mr. Tibbett, without trying, brings more presence to the theater than a dozen more riotous actors.

The musical line is so erratic that on some speeches he must change from spoken conversation to grandiloquent recitative in the middle of a sentence. Mr. Tibbett manages such transitions with great aplomb, and generally makes a powerful figure of the autocratic planter.

Miss Rahn is costarred, and certainly lives up to her billing. Her role, too, is one-dimensional, but she is given far the greatest burden of the singing, and offers it with great clarity and a balanced span of wide range. She has several moments in the second act which are quite touching, though she has a one-dimensional character to sustain through the evening.

The work has been directed by Doris Humphrey, who handled the dancing sequence with precision and tenderness. When big action is indicated, she keeps the stage alive, but is not inventive enough to stir up the visually static sequences.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
November 3, 1950

The Race Problem Set to Music

By Richard Watts Jr.

As the several faithful followers of this observatory must have gathered long ago, I am considerably less dogmatic when discussing the serious-minded musical drama than when pontificating about other matters. It is with becoming modesty, therefore, that I report my suspicion that "The Barrier," which opened at the Broadhurst last night, is better in intention than in achievement, and is hardly likely to add greatly to the laurels which the new lyric drama has been gathering in recent seasons.

"The Barrier," which has a score by Jan Meyerowitz and a libretto by Langston Hughes, is based on a play by Mr. Hughes called "Mulatto," which had a sizable Broadway run some fifteen years ago. A grimly melodramatic incident about a haughty Georgia planter, who is the father of several children by his Negro mistress and is strangled by the proudest and most fearless of his sons, the narrative, for all its dealing with such inflammable dramatic material as a homicide and a lynching, makes for rather a slender theatrical evening.

Adding a Ballet

To fill it out, the authors have added a dance episode, wherein the dead planter's agonized mistress, while waiting for her son to be captured by a lynch mob, dreams of her courtship by the youthful planter. It is an attractive enough ballet number, but I'm afraid that it provides at least two handicaps for the musical drama. It gets in the way of the mood of terror and indignation, and it calls attention to the already too-evident fact that the story is in need of padding. The result is to minimize the work's dramatic impact.

Although the score of "The Barrier" seems to me vigorous and well-sung, and the lyrics are simple and direct, I am not sure that the addition of music always helps the theatrical intensity of the tragic story Mr. Hughes has to tell. It certainly is my impression that there are times when the conventions of opera make a forthright narrative seem artificial, rather than convincing. I cannot believe that it helps things to have an actor sing such a line as "For God's sake, don't aggravate him, honey" or "Let me fix you a little drink."

Matter of Jurisdiction

As in such a superior work as "The Consul," there is far more of opera than of theatre about "The Barrier," and I wonder if the producers are not making a mistake when they ask the drama critics to review it, instead of seeking a verdict from the music judges. Since my opinion has been asked, however, I must consider the work chiefly as drama, and, theatrically, it is my impression that the Hughes-Meyerowitz effort has moments of emotional effectiveness and moving anger, but, on the whole, is only moderately impressive.

The three chief roles are sung by Lawrence Tibbett as the planter, Muriel Rahn as the mistress and Wilton Clary as the rebellious son, and all of them are excellent. Mr. Tibbett is strangled halfway through the second of the two acts, and thereafter is but an offstage voice, but, seen or unseen, he is properly impressive. "The Barrier" is a sincere and earnest work, both as to its operatic form and what it has to say, but my perhaps mistaken feeling is that it does nothing to challenge the standing of Gian-Carlo Menotti.

DAILY NEWS
November 3, 1950

Tibbett, Rahn Fine in 'The Barrier,' But the New Opera Defeats Itself

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Barrier," an opera which was presented at the Broadhurst last evening, has some ingenious music, splendid singing, good acting and a highly dramatic libretto—but, even so, I guess we are going to have to wait until next Monday night at the Met for the opera season to begin. This new work by Langston Hughes and Jan Meyerowitz, contains admirable elements—but, unhappily, the elements don't mix. The libretto by the Negro poet, Mr. Hughes, and the score by the Berkshire Festival's Mr. Meyerowitz, seem nicely dovetailed so far as technical matters go, but spiritually they never get acquainted.

Hughes' story is from his play, "Mulatto"—a strong and straightforward tragedy about the illegitimate son of a Georgia landowner and his Negro housekeeper. Meyerowitz' score, a taut, busy and even nervous affair, is strictly modernist and dissonant. The music belongs with the theatrical work of Menotti and Blitzstein, and probably is as well made as Menotti's setting for "The Consul"—and this this is what's wrong. George Gershwin took a strong Negro tragedy, "Porgy," and made it into a fine folk opera, "Porgy and Bess," because he had a profound feeling for the music of the Negro. Mr. Meyerowitz has no such feeling; he avoids the simple and shuns the melodic, and only in one scene does he get down to plain emotion.

An Exciting Scene.

This scene is the middle one of three in "The Barrier," and I hasten to report that it is a hair-raiser. All of a sudden the work at the Broadhurst becomes tensely alive—but then it subsides into an ineffectual juxtaposition of elements in which song and story stubbornly refuse to mix.

The middle scene is the heart of "The Barrier." Wilton Clary, the mulatto son of Muriel Rahn and Lawrence Tibbett, has become uppity. He has decided, with complete reasonableness, that he can act his white half just as rightfully as he could—and should, Mr. Tibbett thinks—act the black. There is a quarrel in which Tibbett is strangled, and a tingling ending in which Miss Rahn damns the corpse of the man who has been her lover for 30 years.

Miss Rahn, who was one of the Carmen Jonases in "Carmen Jones," is an artist, both as a singer and as an actress. Her work throughout "The Barrier" is splendid, and her big scene evoked great cheers last night. It is not news that Mr. Tibbett also is an artist; his voice is grand and resonant still, and he is one of the best actors in the musical theatre. His portrait of a Southern landowner is genuine.

Very Busy Music.

Mr. Hughes' libretto, like his play, is a work of poignancy; as Mr. Tibbett sings it, it is the tragedy of "a terrible puzzle without any answer." But there is little poignancy, little heartbreak, in the music. It belongs in a different world—a foreign world, perhaps, and certainly a modern one. It could, for instance, fit the libretto of "The Consul" very nicely, and in some such setting it might have won plaudits for Mr. Meyerowitz as an exciting new genius of the opera.

The production of "The Barrier," which is sponsored by Michael Myerberg and Joel Spector, is generally well managed, although there is little of value to me in a dream scene in which ballet dancers and offstage singers relate the early romance of Miss Rahn and Mr. Tibbett.

Herbert Zipper conducts an excellent orchestra—and the composer has taken care to keep every man in the pit as busy as a cat on a Quonset hut. The opera has been staged by Doris Humphrey, the ballet mistress, and the setting is by H. A. Condell.

The New York Times

November 3, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having begun its career at Columbia University last January, Jan Meyerowitz's opera, "The Barrier" has now reached Broadway by easy stages. It was sung by Lawrence Tibbett and Muriel Rahn at the Broadhurst last evening. Music lovers had a high opinion of it when it opened last winter. But it looks and sounds like "art art" in the shrill neighborhood of Broadway. To at least one theatregoer, accustomed to simpler pleasures, it puts a barrier of monotonous and random sound between the theme and the audience. It has more of the qualities of a formal concert than a play.

* * *

Fifteen years ago it was a stinging play by Langston Hughes, entitled "Mulatto" and generally liked by theatre audiences. Mr. Hughes appears on the present program as author of the book and lyrics. Like "Mulatto," "The Barrier" is the harrowing drama of the son of a Negro housekeeper and a white plantation owner in Georgia. Unwilling to conform to local customs respecting Negroes, the mulatto son kills his father in a quarrel and [illegible] a white posse against him.

Even in terms of opera, this is a primitive subject that springs out of savage passions. It is also an indigenously American theme. But to at least one theatregoer, Mr. Meyerowitz's music seems overcivilized and as remote from lynching and the blood lust as anything could be; and it is European in its artistic derivation.

To theatregoers, opera is likely to seem like a complicated form of expression. It certainly seems so in the current instance. For Mr. Hughes' lines are hardly distinguished enough to sustain the complicated texture of Mr. Meyerowitz's score; and the singers give the impression of having to work hard to say something simple. "Mulatto" was a good deal more vivid and horrifying as a drama than it is now as an intellectualized opera. The art of "The Barrier" does not spring from the theme. It springs from art.

* * *

Mr. Meyerowitz is fortunate in his singers. Although Mr. Tibbett is not in his best voice, he is an honest and powerful actor; and his portrait of the frantic white father of a rebellious mulatto boy is an impressive piece of work. Muriel Rahn, an admirable singer and actress, is superb as the frightened mother. As the mulatto boy, Wilton Clary puts considerably less Negro blood into his characterization than the script specifies. He is still a pretty likable white farmboy from Oklahoma. Since he is an agreeable singer, and is skillful with his hands in a mortal scuffle with Mr. Tibbett, a theatregoer probably should refrain from being too technical about the blood count in his acting.

* * *

Doris Humphrey has attended to the staging without breaking down the formalism of Mr. Meyerowitz's style of expression. Nothing really gets said with passion or sincerity or with simple dramatic candor throughout the evening. For "The Barrier" is not "Mulatto" released in terms of sound. It is a sophisticated musical exercise played on the surface of a barbaric theme.

New York Herald Tribune

November 3, 1950

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Georgia Lament

A POWERFUL potential of musical drama is partly realized in "The Barrier." Adapted by Langston Hughes from his own play "Mulatto," the new offering at the Broadhurst stars Lawrence Tibbett and Muriel Rahn as a Georgia plantation owner and the Negro housekeeper who bore him four children. An indifferent score by Jan Meyerowitz is aided by good singing in an atmosphere of terror and heartbreak. "The Barrier" could bear improvement in almost every department, but even as it stands it never strays far from the edge of electrifying musical tragedy.

* * *

Hughes's book and lyrics are a compact dramatic example of the confusions and hatreds arising from prejudice in the more-or-less modern South. The paradox of a father who admires his mulatto son's spirit but wants to kill him for his insolence toward brute social customs is a bitter conflict indeed. The direction is not strong enough; the singers have been told where to stand and what to do, but the production does not match the naked force of the script. Nevertheless Miss Rahn as a terrified mother and Tibbett as a white man torn between training and inclination manage to support each other in a stark and moving vignette of musical theater.

* * *

Meyerowitz's score is somewhat baffling; it does not rise to any notable level of lyric exultation in the most passionate moments. Its best units are a Tibbett soliloquy about his arrogant and illfated son and Miss Rahn's demented cursing of her dead lover after a murder. On the whole, it sounds as though it had been written to match the inflections of the human voice rather than for any melodic quality, and it has a discordant feeling, as though symbolic of mixed blood. The construction is operatic, with most of the dialogue in recitatifs. A ballet of memories is included in the last act, but it could be omitted without taking anything away from a show which is at its best in its simplest, least cluttered scenes.

* * *

Wilton Clary plays the son who refuses to enter his father's house by the back door and eventually comes to a tragic end as a reward for his defiance. Richard Dennis has an excellent bit as a friend who drops in and represents in a single colorful solo the narrow views of the community. "The Barrier" is a surprise package which has moved into town earlier than expected after a brief tryout. It badly misses an extra bit of polish, but it finds Lawrence Tibbett and Muriel Rahn teamed for a fine rendition of the considerable inspiration which the show contains.

Journal American

November 3, 1950

Very Pleasant if You Like a Lot of Singing

By JOHN McCLAIN

You like music? I don't mean "Good Night, Irene"—I mean all night Mendelssohn or some modern facsimilie. Because the case of "The Barrier," a new musical drama which opened at the Broadhurst Theatre last night is almost as simple as that.

Lawrence Tibbett and Muriel Rahn and everybody else concerned sing all the night through, and there is nothing very simple and lilting in their songs certainly nothing vaguely approaching "pop," and if you are seeking such you had best his henceward.

They sing the saga of an old racial problem. Col. Norwood (Tibbett) is of course the lord of a Southern plantation. He brings home a bride but she expires after a polite pause and he resumes an affair with his Negro housekeeper (Rahn).

This produces several children, among them Bert, the youngest, who looks more like a Notre Dame halfback than the result of any such union.

He returns from a schooling up North with new ideas about his status around the old plantation and makes the horrendous mistake of entering the premises by the front door. This leads to no end of trouble. Pop and Bert get into a nasty squabble which reaches a crescendo when the old man is about to liquidate the boy but winds up getting throttled instead.

Hard to Get

It was somewhat hard for me to become accustomed to this new medium at first—the semi-operatic business of singing, "not by the front door—not by the front door" seven or eight times with slight variations to convey a rather simple thought. But in the Second Act I started to catch on, and by the Finale I was quite conditioned.

There also is a ballet, with vocal accompaniment, which ingeniously portrays all the events in the life of the unhappy housekeeper leading up to her tragic dilemma.

I thought Tibbett was in excellent voice and there is no question about the talents of Miss Rahn. Bert, the son (played by Wilton Clary), has an engaging voice and manner although, because of the casting, I kept feeling that he could have easily solved his problem by leaving the joint and accepting a football scholarship at some university where he could have entered all stadia by the front doors.

Whatever your inclinations, this is an ambitious and notable effort by Langston Hughes, who wrote the book and lyrics, and Jan Meyerowitz, the composer.

The property will appeal, in my judgment, to only a specialized and hence relatively small audience. But it will give them a great deal of pleasure while it lasts.

"Hilda Crane"

The New York Times

November 2, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Samson Raphaelson has written an earnest drama about a neurotic woman, "Hilda Crane," which was put on at the Coronet last evening. It is the story of a restless woman who, after two shiftless marriages, tries sincerely to settle down to a third marriage with a man she does not love but cannot help respecting.

Since Mr. Raphaelson is a professional playwright, "Hilda Crane" is well written. It also is admirably acted by a well-selected cast with Jessica Tandy in the leading part. But with all proper respect for the various talents involved, there is no getting away from the fact that the heroine is a tiresome, irritating egotist, and that Mr. Raphaelson's writing and thinking are not original enough to give his play about her much interest or significance.

* * *

No doubt Miss Tandy's presence in the leading part suggests comparisons between Hilda Crane and Blanche du Bois, the desperate heroine of "A Streetcar Named Desire." Miss Tandy gave a remarkable performance in that star-crossed drama. Like Blanche, Hilda has delusions of grandeur and is terrified by the emptiness of the life she has led; and her promiscuities are probably attempts to escape from herself. Again Miss Tandy gives a taut, vibrant, haggard performance of a character who is always on the verge of insanity.

But Blanche was a tormented figure in a poem about the furies. Hilda is a more commonplace person in a fairly conventional drama. Having come home to Winona, Ill., from the New York, where her life has been a series of disasters, she flirts with an old flame who is a professor in the local college. But she accepts an honorable proposal from a sincere but dull local industrialist who has loved her all his life. For two years Hilda tries to conform to his standards. She cannot escape the boredom that has gathered in her own soul, and she wrecks the third marriage and herself.

* * *

Mr. Raphaelson has written "Hilda Crane" earnestly in terms of modern tragedy. Many of the scenes are pithily dramatic. And the production, under Hume Cronyn's direction, is first-rate theatre work. In designing the scenery Howard Bay has caught admirably the dullness of two houses in Winona without sacrificing the beauty an artist is expected to contribute to any subject he is portraying.

All the acting is excellent. Again, Evelyn Varden leaves her mark on a character by playing the part of an old harridan with versatility and integrity. As Hilda's patient mother, Beulah Bondi acts with force, pride and decision. John Alexander's portrait of the husband has the warmth and modesty of a genuine human being who always means what he says. By way of contrast, Frank Sundstrom skillfully plays the vacillating professor whose impulses are weak and wayward.

* * *

There is a lot of serious thinking in the play and color and invention in the performance. But the quality of "Hilda Crane" is not imaginative enough to lift Mr. Raphaelson's central character above her own level. Her level is pretty flat and trivial. She does not seem to be worth the trouble Mr. Raphaelson and Miss Tandy have taken to put her on the stage.

"HILDA CRANE"

Play by Samson Raphaelson; staged by Hume Cronyn; settings by Howard Bay; gowns supervised by Harriett Ames; presented by Arthur Schwartz at the Coronet Theatre, November 1, 1950. The cast:

Clara.....Ann Sullivan
Henry Ottwell...John Alexander
Mrs. Crane.....Beulah Bondi
Hilda Crane.....Jessica Tandy
Mrs. Ottwell....Evelyn Varden
Prof. Charles Jensen.....
Frank Sundstrom
Nell Bromley...Eileen Heckart
Dink Bromley.....
Richard McMurray
Mrs. Nordlinger.....
Madeleine King
Mr. Nordlinger...Watson White
Miss Keavney...Frieda Altman

Synopsis: Act I. Scene 1. Mrs. Crane's living room, Winona, Ill., mid-afternoon, April. Scene 2. The same. Later that afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. The same. Two months later. 8:30 on a June evening. Scene 2. The same. The following afternoon. Act III. Scene 1. The Ottwells' living room. A Sunday afternoon in June, two years later. Scene 2. The same. 4:00 a. m.—that night.

DAILY NEWS

November 2, 1950

Jessica Tandy Heads a Fine Cast In a Good Sex Drama, 'Hilda Crane'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "Hilda Crane" Samson Raphaelson has a sure-fire theme—the emotions of a woman. He has written his play with insight and professional skill. Last evening an admirable and well-directed company brought "Hilda Crane" to the stage of the Coronet Theatre, where it should thrive—particularly on matinee days.

In outline Mr. Raphaelson's drama may seem embarrassingly like a radio serial about a woman who is making her third official try at giving herself to some good man; but the author, who is a stage craftsman of intelligence and experience, has given this outline a treatment which is considerably better than a slick surface job—and the result is an interesting play.

There are some excellent actors in "Hilda Crane"—Jessica Tandy in the title role; Evelyn Varden, John Alexander, Beulah Bondi and Frank Sundstrom being the principals. For each of them Mr. Raphaelson has written at least one absorbing scene, and under the direction of Hume Cronyn they and their colleagues deliver top-grades performances. The chief emotional burden is Miss Tandy's, of course, and this slender young woman is just the one to carry it all the way from ectasy to despair and suicide. As we know from "A Streetcar Named Desire" and various film performances, Miss Tandy is one of our very best delineators of feminine frailty.

Fine Scene for Varden.

Miss Varden, who usually turns up as somebody who is funny, has something better than incidental comedy this time. In the role of an unpleasant and possessive mother, Miss Varden acts with dramatic force. Mr. Alexander is extraordinarily effective as a man with a loving heart and an uncomplicated mind, and Mr. Sundstrom is equally right as a gent of high intellect and low morals. Miss Bondi manages the role of another mother—a pleasant one with a clear head—with comforting assurance.

Miss Tandy has returned to her small Illinois home town after an unsuccessful fling in New York. She has been married twice and divorced twice. To some people she is a tramp, but to herself she is a woman who has the normal and honorable yearning to be in love. Mr. Sundstrom, the intellectual, is most interesting to her—but he wants her on his own terms, which do not include marriage. Mr. Alexander is least interesting to her—but he does offer security and a deep, if clumsily expressed, devotion.

A New Producer.

On the advice of her mother, Miss Bondi, Miss Tandy takes Mr. Alexander as a husband. She does not love him now, but her mother assures her she will in time. It is a false assurance—and that is the play.

Every season should have at least one sex drama, and now we've got one. Mr. Raphaelson hasn't been doing much for Broadway lately, and it is a pleasure to welcome him back. It also is a pleasure to congratulate Arthur Schwartz upon a satisfying and workmanlike production—his first venture as a manager in the legitimate field.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 2, 1950

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Problem Drama

SAMSON RAPHAELSON'S new play dramatizes a woman's search for happiness intensely but in a frail and wavering context. "Hilda Crane" is a tragedy of the so-called "free" woman of the Twentieth Century, with Jessica Tandy playing the central role of a twice-married waif who comes back to her small Illinois birthplace looking for emotional security. Under the direction of Hume Cronyn it rises to occasional heights—or, rather, descends to depths of despair and conflict. But it is not a tightly written or constructed piece, and too much of the play is merely another woman's problem drama exploring various avenues of earnest conversation.

Miss Tandy is so well able to convey a sense of hysteria lurking just under a facade of gayety that it becomes an awkward thing to handle in the softer moments. Having plucked the city vine leaves from her hair and fled from maladjustment to a smaller scale of living, she finds that she still cannot conform to a monogamous standard, either with a professor described as "all Shelley and ice cream" or a substantial and self-made lawn mower manufacturer. In the few moments when the script generates a real conflict, as between the girl and her future mother-in-law, or in the final scene when hysteria can no longer be restrained, Miss Tandy is in supreme command of her art. For most of the time, however, she is left to make nervous gestures within a doldrum of oblique argument and counter-argument.

Raphaelson's dramatic symbols are vague and seem to change their shapes as the play progresses. The professor is a representative of romance and the manufacturer of solidity, and it is the heroine's job to choose between them, or maybe reconcile them in her life, with the help of advice from her mother, mother-in-law and friends. The first offends her with an indecent but attractive proposition, and the second bores her to the point of a nervous breakdown. The final impression is one of a simple theme clouded over with artificial passions rather than expanded into universal meaning.

Beulah Bondi makes a good contrast with the heroine as a composed but single-minded mother trying to keep her daughter on the straight and narrow, but many of the exchanges between them have just a taste of radio serial philosophy. Evelyn Varden gives an earthly and colorful picture of a violently resentful mother-in-law, and Frank Sundstrom and John Alexander are the two suitors whose interests range from poetry to hardware. Cronyn's direction is well styled to a play about the descent of darkness on a bewildered spirit, though it seldom breaks the monotone of pain and protest. Designed by Howard Bay and produced by Arthur Schwartz, "Hilda Crane" is a play which talks a great deal about agony but captures very little of it in dramatic form at the Coronet.

Journal American

November 2, 1950

Jessica Tandy Stars In a Good Solid Hit

By JOHN McCLAIN

Jessica Tandy, accompanied by a troupe of exceptionally talented supporters, arrived at the Coronet Theatre last evening in a new drama by Samson Raphaelson called "Hilda Crane" and in my album it is a good solid hit.

These are people who speak and behave with verity, whose problems I understand, and I came away from the premises feeling that I would not have been robbed even if I'd paid the $6 (plus tax) indicated on my tickets. The thing is written with strength, is acted and directed immaculately and staged with taste. I had a very good time.

The plot is not pedestrian. The title role of Hilda (Miss Tandy) is that of an emancipated coed who leaves the college town where she was brought up and pursues two unsuccessful marriages in Chicago and New York.

As the show opens she has come back to the little college town to move in with her widowed mother and readjust her less-emancipated life.

There is a small-town Babbitt, the poor boy who worshipped her and is now rich as the result of a lawnmower factory, and there is the prematurely gray assistant professor with whom she had an unfulfilled romance in her college days and whence she fled to marry her first husband, a football star.

Both these characters want this girl. Somewhere in between is her mother, who views life with extreme practicality and is plugging for the lawn-mower magnate.

He is dough-heavy and dull—but dependable. The mater points out that she married Jessica's father for somewhat similar reasons and the love department came along in due time.

The snake in the grass appears in the form of the mower-maker's mother. She sacrificed everything to give her boy a decent chance in life and she ain't going to let him make a mistake at this late date.

She has had Jessica investigated and the report is slightly haircurling. She tells this and more to Jessica on the very brink of the marriage, and what Jessica tells her in return sends her to her death and allows the marriage to proceed on schedule. This scene, in the second act, is as moving as any I can recall in recent seasons.

Marriage Flops

Of course, the marriage doesn't work. The gentleman-of-distinction professor comes back and she goes out with him. The girl finally realizes that her life is a shambles and there may have been something in what her late mother-in-law had to say that fateful afternoon before she went to the church.

As a result she takes the only obvious, but rather prolonged, wayout.

If I were to offer some slight criticism, and I have almost none, I would say the whole proceedings might have been strengthened by making the mower-manufacturer somewhat less a small-town "square." It was a little hard at times to believe that she could put up with him for two minutes, let alone two years.

Otherwise there is nothing but applause. Miss Tandy needs no fresh adjectives after a long ride on "A Streetcar Named Desire" and I can only say that she was, to me, triumphant in a part that even more ideally suited her.

Beulah Bondi, as the matriarch mother, was superlative—and the same can be recorded for the performances of John Alexander as the husband (even though he might have been given a less powerful injection of corn), Frank Sundstrom as the professor and, particularly, Evelyn Varden, as the mother-in-law.

Sam Raphaelson has done us all a favor in bringing this fine script to the Boradway stage, and I'm sure he'd be the first to share credit with Hume Cronyn, who directed it with such taste and talent, and Arthur Schwartz, a re-converted composer, who produced it with courage and affluence.

Daily Mirror

November 2, 1950

'Hilda Crane' Is Stirring, Compassionate Drama

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Samson Raphaelson is an important dramatist. He has integrity. He writes with distinction and keen insight. He is constantly searching for human values. He is interested in what we live by and why. "Hilda Crane," which Arthur Schwartz brought to the Coronet Theatre last evening, is his finest play to date.

Raphaelson's Hilda Crane is a modern girl who believes that women should have the same freedom in love and the same opportunity for a career as do men. This, she learned from her late father. Her determined mother, on the other hand, thinks that women should marry for security and hope that affection will develop in due course.

Emotionally torn between the conflicting philosophies of her parents, Hilda acquires a few lovers and a couple of unsuccessful marriages. It is at this stage that she returns home to an Illinois college town to take stock of herself after repeated failures in New York. Here, her mother persuades her to marry a wealthy, well-meaning manufacturer, though her instincts are all for an impecunious and caddish professor.

Hilda honestly tries to make her husband happy, the more so because she had won him over the bitter opposition of his shrewd mother. However, upon meeting the professor again after a couple of years, she throws caution to the winds, commits adultery, later realizes she is a little better than a literate tramp and takes an overdose of sleeping tablets.

"Hilda Crane" is an American equivalent of Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler." It is a gripping study of a proud woman's downfall because of her inability to cope with life. It is stirring drama, tense, uncompromising, and yet marked by compassion. It is a play that demands your constant attention, and eminently rewards it.

Jessica Tandy gives a magnificent performance in the title role. It is inevitable that comparison will be made with her Blanche DuBois of "A Streetcar Named Desire." She will certainly win a few of the annual medals given for distinguished acting.

John Alexander is perfect as the kindly husband. Frank Sundstrom is excellent as the wolfish teacher. Evelyn Varden contributes a terrifically effective portrayal as the stuffy young businessman's possessive mother, while Beulah Bondi is vastly helpful as Hilda's frustrated, frigid parent. Salutes also are due Eileen Heckart, Richard McMurray, Watson White and Madeleine King.

Hume Cronyn's sensitive direction does full justice to Raphaelson's superb script. Howard Bay's settings catch the play's mood. His last act conception of a tasteless modernistic living room is morbidly terrifying.

"Hilda Crane" should have an especial appeal for women, though their escorts should be moved by it, too. It looms as a solid dramatic hit.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 2, 1950

'Hilda Crane' Depicts Woes of Career Gal

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Modern drama.

Topic—20th Century woman.

Theme—Results of independence.

Cast—Superb.

I find it—Shaking and utterly engrossing.

The vigor of "Hilda Crane" lies in the powerful drama and quite shattering comment on our time which the playwright makes.

Samson Raphaelson talks about familiar middle-class people, and his remarks and conclusions about woman in modern society apply with startling universality to the queen of the television show, or the janitor's daughter.

Mr. Raphaelson has written a play in which every brief line is important. The only plot grows from his characters. These people are so considerably revealed that their effect on each other builds an inevitable story.

Back to Home Town.

Hilda Crane returns to the college town where she grew up, after a career as a department store buyer and two marriages have failed her. Still young and very personable, she has two beaux who were deeply attracted to her before she left.

One is a romantic, shiftless professor, for whom she feels a strong physical magnetism. The other is a clumsy, rich and respectable manufacturer, still under the thumb of his determined mother. Because her own mother insists that security is more important than love, Hilda marries the manufacturer, but only after her future mother-in-law has tried to stop her in a hair-raising incident.

In time the safety of a good marriage becomes stifling. What has seemed a reasonable standard of morality for a career woman clings to her, though it is dynamite to her new conventional existence.

Wrecked Marriage.

A nervous breakdown results from her efforts to make the dull marriage last. She arrives at a point where the temptation of the man who has always attracted her, but never really wanted to marry her, is too much. She wrecks her marriage and her self esteem.

Since she is clearly unequipped for any kind of happiness, she takes the all too familiar way out, of an overdose of sleeping pills.

The play is directed by Hume Cronyn with the most direct kind of simplicity. And it is played with extraordinary clarity by a brilliantly selected cast.

Jessica Tandy is starred in the title role, and in her playing a remarkably lyrical quality of hope mingles with growing hopelessness. She has a warmth here that is entirely unlike her portrayal of the remote neurotic of "Streetcar."

Deeply Sympathic.

Hilda is a long role, and rings many changes. The star's intent is always clear. In the fateful progression of this woman's story, the actress wins deep sympathy without ever apologizing for her standards or her behavior.

Second honors must certainly go to Evelyn Varden for her remarkable picture of Hilda's mother-in-law. Here is a woman asking no quarter. To herself she is her son's well-wisher. To Hilda, she is fanatically possessive. She loses, hating Hilda for a tramp, but after her death, she wins.

So lucid and pointed is Miss Varden's performance that her presence is substantially felt in the last act, after the character's death.

Beulah Bondi is expertly consistent as the heroine's mother, so sure because she has survived the hard choice of suppressing all her instincts. She is the essence of Victorian ethics, safe as long as appearances are preserved.

John Alexander and Frank Sundstrom are most happily cast, the former as the modest man of wealth, and the latter as the shallow romantic.